

2018 STUDENT WRITING CONTEST

Eastern Region Essay Winner

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Mavis Claytor-Ford, the first African American to be accepted to University of Virginia's nursing program, was denied student housing due to her race; however, she overcame this obstacle and earned her nursing degree from U.Va.

Claytor-Ford proved herself to be a strong figure for young black women like myself. Being a young black woman living in present-day America, I can relate a lot to the struggles that Claytor faced when attending U.Va. Being black in America is difficult enough and is almost seen as a crime. As a young black woman, I see and feel this. In a room full of white men and women, I find myself uncomfortable and trapped in my thoughts. I can feel my confidence crumbling to the ground as I feel inferior and worthless.

The first two years of my high school career were extremely hard for me because I had found myself in a school that wasn't predominantly black for the first time and it was very strange. I realized that I wasn't as prepared for the transition to high school as the white kids in the school were. These kids had come from private schools, where they only wrote in cursive, were already taking foreign language classes, and had already gained high school credit in middle school, as opposed to me coming from middle school, where I hadn't taken any foreign language classes and had no high school credits.

I found myself in my thoughts and undermining myself. I was no longer the bright kid I was in middle school. I had let my grades and myself fall. I let the one thing I should be proud of cause me to be scared and to undermine my intelligence: my skin. My mother began to notice my grades had dropped, and she sat and had a conversation with me. She told me something that I will never forget, and it will always move me. My mother said, "Don't ever demean yourself or think you are less than because you have darker skin. You are beautiful and intelligent. Embrace the black beauty and brain God embellished you with."

From then on I knew what my worth was. No one can ever make me feel inferior or dumb because of the color of my skin. I am a young, intelligent black woman, and with my brain I can accomplish anything.